

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Harold Saunders

Attached is the background paper on the Iraqi political system that you requested. You will note that I had the authors boil out the points on dynamics in the cover memo. The only price for this service is a candid critique.



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6 September 1973
(DATE)


MEMORANDUM FOR:

Mr. Harold Saunders
Room 386
Old Executive Office Bldg.

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Secretary of Defense

Attached is a recent paper we have done concerning the Iraqi political system. Knowing your interest in the Persian Gulf, I thought you might find it of some interest.


Special Assistant to the
Director of Central Intelligence

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6 September 1973
(DATE)

MEMORANDUM FOR:

The Honorable William P. Clements, Jr.
Deputy Secretary of Defense

MEMORANDUM FOR: William E. Colby

Attached is a memo concerning the Iraqi political system which was tailor-made for the NSC Staff. It reflects substantial inputs from OCI, ONE, and DDO.



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6 September 1973
(DATE)

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5 September 1973

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Some Notes on Iraqi Politics

The attached paper provides some of the facts about the Iraqi political structure as it stood before the recent coup attempt. The paper, however, is pretty bare bones; moreover, the structure itself is being revamped in the wake of the failure of the coup. So the usefulness of this information is limited. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to elucidate much more on Iraqi political dynamics. We can, however, offer a few notes that may be helpful in feeling the atmosphere in Baghdad.

First, the level of political violence is very high. This has been a tradition in Iraqi politics; the "interest groups" in Iraq have never been able to work out relations that did not involve physical intimidation of their rivals and opponents. The Baathist regime has used violence systematically since its 1968 coup, and Saddam al-Tikriti, who now poses as the "good guy" of the regime, has been the pre-eminent practitioner. Iraqi politics at this point are politics of repression, with the various levels of the Baath Party structure acting as "committees of public safety" to pinpoint the regime's enemies so that the Baath Party militia and the security apparatus can keep them cowed. This has been effective; Iraqis seem to feel that potential opponents, including those in the army, are "frozen."

It follows from this that the present government has no significant constituency outside the Baath Party adherents. We do not believe that the new National Front will amount to much more than a paper organization, with the Communists being allowed to occupy some committee seats and receiving the privilege of not being beaten up for a change. In return, the Communists presumably might supply some of the constituency, at least in the cities, that the Baath lacks. We are sceptical that this work with the Communists; the Kurds clearly are steering away from such an arrangement--and the reports of military action against them may reflect a stick-and-carrot effort by the Baathists.

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The present government is also very thin in administrative talent. There are some brilliant exceptions to this generalization, but they are only a handful--Saddam Hammadi, the top oil man, is one. Successive coups and purges since 1958 have practically eliminated the group of educated Iraqis--originally not large--who had both some experience of the outside world and some gift for leadership. The effects of this situation are almost certainly being felt in the military as well as in the civilian bureaucracy. One is reminded, with differences in scale of course, of the situation in Russia in the 1920's. The present "turn to the West" may reflect some consciousness that Iraq badly needs more administrative and technical skills, as well as some more friends abroad.

Finally, and most frustratingly for the analysts, the most recent coup attempt remains mysterious, both as to its real source and to its motivation. We have a strong feeling that if we could sort out who tried to do what to whom and why, we would have a very good key to current political dynamics. We still suspect that Saddam was somewhere behind it or at least knew of it; if so the executions that followed were efforts to silence other participants who knew too much. Moreover, if we suspect this, so very likely does President Bakr; if this is correct, then the tension between him and Saddam must be very high indeed, and Bakr must be looking to his associates in the army for support as well as for some opportunity to "get" Saddam if this could be done. Bakr, however, is a weak individual, probably sick, and he does not command strong support, although he "represents" the army. In this respect, he has been and continues to be useful to Saddam.

We are left then, with a situation that is stable in the sense that virtually all the Baath's opponents, except the Kurds, have been terrorized or neutralized, but also with a structure that is unstable in terms of the relations between people at the top and which rests on violence to maintain the leadership's position with respect to the people at the bottom or outside the structure. This is not a happy situation nor a happy government for the US to try to do business with.

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OCI-2331/73
5 September 1973

INTELLIGENCE REPORT

SUBJECT: Iraq--A Political Study

This paper deals in brief with the Iraqi political system--its background, structure, and conflicts. It reviews some of the predominant political forces in the country and some of the recent political changes that have been set in motion.

Background--Modern Iraq is a case study of military involvement in the political life of a country. The Iraq Army had the dubious honor of introducing the military coup to the modern Arab political scene in 1936. In the decade and a half since the coup in 1958 that toppled the monarchy and established a de jure republic but a de facto dictatorship, Iraq has experienced four distinct changes in regime, ten coups d'etat or attempted coups, and at least 14 cabinets with an average longevity of less than a year. In virtually every instance, the military was involved to some extent, and was often the prime mover.

The military revolution in 1958 altered the entire complexion of Iraqi politics and government. It virtually eliminated the upper class "old guard" and placed the government in the hands of more radical officers drawn primarily from the lower middle class and lacking political training and experience. Violence became an even more prominent feature in the struggle for power. The ensuing uncertainty and lack of direction has resulted in an increasing concentration of political power in the hands of a few men.

The current regime, which seized power in 1968, is an alliance of moderate officers and the socialist Baath Party. It has substituted one-party government for one-man rule, but like its predecessors, is inherently unstable. If it differs in any appreciable way it is in the tenacity with

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which it clings to power--confounding the many political observers who expected it to tear itself apart long ago. The recent coup attempt has tended to unify competing forces within the regime, temporarily at least, and has accelerated the trend toward a further consolidation of power.

The Dynamics of the Regime

Iraq is nominally a constitutional republic, but in fact power is concentrated in the office of the president, the 15-member Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), and the leadership of the Baath Party--the only legitimate political party in Iraq. There are no popular elections per se, although there are intra-party elections. In the aftermath of the recent coup attempt, the RCC seems to be moving toward the establishment of a National Council which will have at least symbolic legislative functions. It will be appointed by the RCC, however, and presumably will be responsive to the present leadership. (See annex for discussion of the structure of government.)

The principal actors in Iraqi politics include:

-- The military, and particularly the 90,000-man army, which is the mainstay of any Iraqi regime. The army is the self-appointed "custodian of the national interest" and as such can impose its will on any government. In the current scene, however, the army has remained aloof from the political turmoil in the wake of the abortive coup attempt. The army per se apparently was not involved, although individual soldiers may have been, along with the internal security forces. The army's interests are represented in both the RCC and the Regional Command of the Baath Party.

-- The ruling Baath Party, a secular political institution with an involved, if somewhat vague, left-wing socio-political philosophy. Its credo appeals to the educated middle class elite more than to the less sophisticated peasants and workers. Like the Communist Party, it has a tradition of clandestine activity and maintains a highly compartmentalized structure composed

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of cells, sections, and branches. The entire structure (defined in party terms as a "region" of the Arab "nation") is directed by a 7-man Regional Command. Baath members tend to combine informally into "civilian" and "military" wings; rivalries between the two are a source of friction.

-- Other political parties. Although they are technically proscribed, the government apparently sanctions the numerically small but influential Communist Party and the Kurdish Democratic Party as long as they cooperate with the regime and maintain a low profile.

-- The Kurds, who make up about 30 percent of the Iraqi population. They are concentrated in the northern mountains and are in a chronic state of revolt. They are part of the some 5-6 million Kurds located in contiguous areas of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey. Their ultimate goal is an independent Kurdish state, but the Iraqi Kurds will settle, for the moment at least, for autonomy within a unified Iraqi state as long as they also share in the central government. The Bakr regime by an agreement signed in March 1970, promised autonomy to the Kurds by March 1974. Recently the government has begun to hedge on this commitment. Persistent rumors of sharp clashes between the Kurds and government forces remain unconfirmed, but the Kurds reportedly expect further serious fighting. The Kurds have token representation in the national government, and the Kurdish Democratic Party headed by Barzani has been invited by both the Baathist and the Communists to join in a national front government. Barzani, highly suspicious of the motives of both groups, remains aloof in his mountain fastness.

The two most influential leaders are President Bakr and Saddam Husayn Tikriti, Vice Chairman of the RCC and Deputy Chairman of the Regional Command of the Baath Party. In addition to his role as chief of state, Bakr serves as his own prime minister and assumed the defense portfolio following the death of General Shihab during the June 30 coup attempt. Bakr's health is not good, however, and there is some question as to how vigorously he can exercise the

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powers of his office. Although there is no stipulated presidential term, he presumably may be removed by action of the RCC. Tikriti has been described by some political observers as the "strong man" of the regime--a shrewd, ruthless operator adept at keeping his opponents off balance. Certainly he played a key role in putting down the recent coup attempt, although some suspect he may also have had a hand in planning it. Tikriti has played a more prominent public role in recent weeks through public appearances, announcements, and press conferences and has engaged in important meetings with foreign representatives. Bakr and Tikriti, sometimes viewed as potential rivals, appear for the present at least, to be working together to consolidate their power and to unify the country. They are also probably purging suspected disloyal elements from the Baath Party, the government, and the security forces.

Point of conflict--Personalities, social philosophies, and ethnic differences, rather than political, social, or economic issues per se, underlie the various political groupings and power blocs in Iraq.

Within the Baath Party government itself, there appear to be no basic policy differences, but there are varying degrees of emphasis among individuals and groups jockeying for position. President Bakr, as a former army general, is often identified with the so-called "military wing" of the party and Saddam Husayn Tikriti, the Deputy Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council is generally viewed as the head of the party's "civilian wing." But here also the differences are largely personalities rather than issues. The recent coup attempt brought yet another apparent faction--or perhaps subfaction of the civilian wing--into the open. Again it was largely a case of personalities rather than basic issues, although the individuals behind the coup attempt apparently favored greater Iraqi participation in the Arab-Israeli conflict and a more aggressive program against the Kurds.

The general climate among intellectuals, traditional politicians, and the general public seems to be one of discontent with the regime. But as long as the Baath maintains the loyalty and control of the military--and as long as its reputation for dealing harshly with dissenters keeps potential opponents cowed--its unpopularity is not likely to affect its tenure.

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The recent Baath decision to join with the Communist Party in a "national front"--a development which the bulk of the Communists have long sought--again points to the lack of major contentious issues between the two groups. As long as the Baath Party remains pro-USSR and continues to wage an "anti-imperialist" campaign, the Communists probably will lend open support. The Communist line on US strategy in the Middle East is identical with the views of the Baath. The Communist Party of Iraq probably will press the regime to improve domestic living conditions, to increase economic and cultural cooperation with the socialist bloc, to take decisive measures against domestic reactionary elements, to call for a more vigorous policy in fighting "imperialism, zionism, and reaction" and to solve the Kurdish issue on the basis of autonomy, but differences with the government on these issues are of degree rather than principle.

The Communist Party itself is divided on the extent to which it should cooperate with the Baath Government, and the regime's record of arrests and suppression suggests that some Communist concern is justified. There are currently three ostensible Communist representatives in the 29-member cabinet; one of these at least has been disavowed by the party, however, and only one of the three holds a portfolio. This number probably will increase if and when a national front government is established.

The Kurds, with about 20 percent of the population, are a significant power bloc with military strength to back up their demands. Although there are currently five nominal Kurds on the cabinet, only four of them are in any way affiliated with the Kurdish movement--the other is a member of the Communist Party--and none has been given an important ministerial post.

The Kurds have very specific differences with the Baath Party and the government, but the points at issue are parochial rather than national in scope. Kurdish demands include:

- Autonomy for the area under Kurdish jurisdiction with a regional president, council, and legislature. Authority to pass regional laws, assess taxes, and approve regional economic plans.

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-- Kurdish representation in the national assembly or council proportionate to the size of the Kurdish population;

-- A proportionate share of the national budget and development expenditures.

The Kurds, who remain on the defensive both militarily and politically, have thus far rejected all invitations to join a national front government with the Baath and Communist Parties.

The Kurds themselves are not without dissension. Although Mulla Mustafa Barzani is the acknowledged leader of the bulk of the Kurdish minority, several thousand broke away from the parent body several years ago and have aligned themselves with the Baath Government. Factionalism, however, is not a serious concern of the Kurdish Democratic Party.

Other political forces to be reckoned with include inter-communal, inter-tribal and class friction resulting from the predominant role being played by the Sunni Muslim minority in a country with a distinct Shiite Muslim majority.

Prospects

The current regime under the leadership of Bakr and Tikriti has made little progress in solving Iraq's basic national problems and remains insecure. Nevertheless, it has weathered the recent coup attempt and is working to undergird its power position. It is going through the motions of restructuring party and government institutions, although this is likely to be merely a change in facade, leaving the government no more responsible or responsive than before. Tikriti has indicated that he intends to democratize the government, but bona fide elections appear to be out of the question in the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, questionable elements are reportedly being purged from positions of influence.

The main potential threat to the regime is from as yet unidentified opponents within its own ranks, or from the military. The track record of the Bakr regime suggests

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that no significant shift in the power balance is to be expected as long as Bakr and Tikriti--and as long as the party's military and civilian wings--continue to cooperate reasonably well. These alliance could come unstuck under the pressure of outside circumstances however. Major new trouble with the Kurds, for example, could shake the regime.

An irreconcilable split in party ranks could prompt the army to step in once again. Given the lack of popular support for the regime and its vulnerability to coup attempts, key army officers such as the commanders of the Baghdad Garrison and the Republican Guards Brigade assume a particular importance far beyond their ranks. As in the past, a military coup probably would only perpetuate the existing system albeit under stronger military influence.

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ANNEX

Structure of the Iraqi Government

Iraq is nominally a constitutional republic with de facto power concentrated in the office of the president, the Revolutionary Command Council, and the leadership of the Baath Party. The 15-member Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) is defined by the Provisional Constitution as "the highest authority in the state" and is described as "the revolutionary organ which led the masses of the people and the armed forces on the morning of 17 July 1968." The members of the RCC are also members of the top policy body of the Baath Party--the Regional Command--and all apparently played a significant role in the 17 July coup.

The Revolutionary Command Council has the constitutional authority to:

- appoint or dismiss members of the RCC as long as the total number does not exceed 15;
- elect the President of the Republic who also becomes the chairman of the RCC.
- Control the armed forces and the internal security forces;
- appoint members of the cabinet and to relieve them;
- Supervise the affairs of the republic;
- issue edicts which have the force of law;
- ratify laws and treaties.

The RCC also acts as the legislative body pending the formation of the National Council which now appears to be in the works. The 100-member council will be chosen by the RCC, presumably within the next few months, and will represent various political, economic, and social elements in the country. The National Council will be the first Iraqi

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"parliament" in 15 years, and it is certain, despite the declared intention to form a national front, that the ruling Baath Party will occupy the majority of Council seats. There are no popular elections per se in Iraq, although there are intra-party elections. The announced primary mission of the Council when formed will be to draft a permanent constitution.

The President of Iraq is chosen by the members of the RCC and has the following powers and functions:

- to safeguard the "independence and integrity of the country;"
- to safeguard internal and external security;
- to supervise "the sound implementation of the Constitution, laws and decision;"
- to appoint and dismiss vice-presidents, ministers, governors, judges, civil servants, and military officials.

He has limited veto over the decisions of the RCC.

The 29-member cabinet, named by the President and the RCC and serving at their pleasure, drafts laws and submits them to the RCC for approval (to the National Council when formed), issues administrative regulations and decisions, draws up the state's General Plan, and prepares the general budget. Individually, the cabinet members preside over the operations of the ministries they head.

The structure of government below the cabinet level is as highly centralized as it was under the monarchy with the result that initiative at the lower levels is discouraged and the ministers and governors are overburdened with routine decisions and administrative detail.

Iraq is divided into 16 provinces of unequal size which are further subdivided into districts and subdistricts. The provincial governors are chosen by and responsible to the Minister of Interior and the chief district and subdistrict officers are chosen by and generally responsible to the governors.

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